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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify the most frequently reported problems and problem categories--or subscales--as defined by the college form of the Mooney Problem Checklist (Mooney and Gordon, 1950). Subjects were three groups of students: 49 members of a health class, 35 potential resident advisors, and 23 members of elementary education methods courses. The number of problems circled ranged from two to 90 with an average of 28 problems. Problems most frequently circled concerned personal, social, and course work areas. With the exception of the Education Methods students and their concern for obtaining a teaching contract, there were few differences in the problems reproted by the participants of this study and their predecessors of the 1960's. The findings emphasize the need for campus programs that encourage personal-social growth of individual students. (Author/JLL)

Problems Reported by Students In Educational Methods Courses

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Teacher trainers and student personnel workers have come to accept as an annual rite the litany of complaints education majors voice regarding methods courses. After several encounters with individual students, it is not surprising to note that there is a general acceptance of the presumption that a source of many problems of education majors enrolled in the methods sequence is the course of study, this despite a continual revamping of these courses.

The purpose of this study was to identify the most frequently reported problems and problem categories - or subscales - as defined by the college form of the Mooney Problem Checklist (Mooney and Gordon, 1950). The three groups of students in the study included those taking methods courses required for elementary education majors. The selection of groups permitted comparisons of the sources of problems. The study provided answers to these questions: What problems and problem categories (Mooney's subscales) are most frequently identified by students? What differences are there between educational methods students and other students in reported problem sources? Specifically, to what degree do curriculum and teaching procedures represent a source for students' problems?

The Mooney Problem Checklist was developed to permit students to express their problems, to assist personnel workers in identifying the problems young persons have, and to conduct research on youth's problems (Mooney and Gordon, 1950, P. 3). Mooney's checklist was used in a study of the problems of over-, under-, and normal-achieving college students

(De Sena, 1966) and to identify the characteristics of problems of emotionally disturbed and normal adolescents (Deiker and Pryer, 1973).

Other studies related to student problems were reported by Musgrove (1969) and Houston (1972). Using a population of students in Great Britain, Musgrove sought information to compare the sources of student problems between selected student groups. Houston studied the sources of student problems to determine whether the present psychological adjustment of students, as they reported it, was a predictor of future academic performance.

Method

A college form of the Mooney Problem Checklist, modified by using every other item, was developed.[1] This 165 item checklist included 15 items in each of Mooney's subscales.

The college form of the Mooney included the following eleven subscales and codes:

1. Health and Physical Development (HPD).
2. Finances, Living Conditions, and Employment (FLE).
3. Social-Recreational Activities (SRA).
4. Social-Psychological Relations (SPR).
5. Personal-Psychological Relations (PPR).
6. Courtship, Sex, and Marriage (CSM).
7. Home and Family (HF).
8. Morals and Religion (MR).
9. Adjustment to College Work (ACW).
10. The Future-Vocational and Educational (FVE).
11. Curriculum and Teaching Procedures (CTP).

Complete rationale and validation of the instrument are found in the Mooney Problem Checklists Manual (Mooney and Gordon, 1950).

The modified checklist was administered to three groups of students. The first group, a randomly selected health class, contained 49 students.

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1. Single copies available from the senior author.

Enrolled in a required course, with freshmen through senior students attending, this group of students represents the general student population (GP). The second group (35 students) comprised participants in a training program for potential resident advisors. The participants, all dormitory students, were defined as campus leaders (RA). The final group to complete the checklist was enrolled in elementary education methods courses (EM). Randomly selected, the section of 23 students represented about 38 percent of those enrolled in methods courses that semester. All students were enrolled at a small (fewer than 2,000) state supported college in the Middle Atlantic states area.

After providing some demographic data (names were not required) participants were instructed to complete the 165 item checklist by circling the number beside any item they felt was a problem, worry, or concern. The equivalent of one class period (50 minutes) was required to complete the checklists.

The following results present information about the total population followed by information about the selected groups. The selected group comparisons include the most frequently reported problems, the most frequently reported subscales, and an analysis of statistical treatment of the data.

Results

Completed checklists obtained from all (N=107) students surveyed produced the following data. The average student was 20 years old, and 42 percent of the subjects were male. These data show that subjects in the study were representative of the general student population. The number of problems circled ranged from two to 90 with an average of 28 problems. In other words, the average students reported that

17 percent of the 165 items were problems referring to themselves.

Table 1 shows the first five problems identified by the total population and ranked by the frequency of their selection. Mooney's subscale for the problem was also identified.

Table one here

The five problems most frequently circled were items from five different subscales. Table 2 shows the first five problem subscales identified by the total population. The subscales were also ranked by the frequency of their selection.

Table two here

Frequencies for subscales were computed by summing the 15 items identified with the subscale. The highest possible frequency for any subscale was computed to be 1605.

The data obtained from the three selected groups were also analyzed. Due to unequal sizes, the results were reported in terms of percentages. Table 3 shows the first three ranking problems with percentages for each student group. This summary was limited to the three highest ranking problems. Beyond the first three rankings, many "ties" occurred.

Table three here

Problems most frequently circled by students were in the areas of personal, social and course work areas. Table 4 shows the first through fifth ranked problem subscales for each student group. Again, percentage scores were used. All scores were rounded to the whole number.

Table four here

The following analysis of data shows comparisons of the results of the total group in the study with results of earlier studies.

To answer the question, what problem categories (Mooney's subscales) were most frequently identified by the selected groups, we referred to data summarized in table 4. Each group had a different first-ranked category. A contingency chi square (Bruning and Kintz, 1968) was used to determine the independence of the first-ranked subscale with regard to groups. The computed chi square of 17.350 and four degrees of freedom ($P < .01$) suggested that the relationship of first-ranked subscales was probably a function of group status.

The finding that the number one subscale for students in elementary education methods was Social and Recreational Activities (SRA) and the comparison groups had first-ranked subscales associated with academic

adjustment (subscales ACW and CTP) does not support our introductory observation that methods courses appeared to be the main source for problems of education majors.

Comparisons were made between groups for the item "Doubting I can get a job in my chosen vocation." Within the Education Methods group, 52 percent identified finding a job as a problem. Thirty-four percent of the Resident Advisor trainees circled the item and 12 percent of the General Population. It was possible to test the significance of the percentages using the Lawshe-Baker Nomograph (Downie and Heath, 1970). The required omega to obtain significance ($P < .05$) when comparing General Population group with an Education Methods group was .36. The computed omega was a .50--a significant difference.

The required omega to obtain significance ($P < .05$) when comparing Resident Advisor trainees with Education Methods students was .38. The computed omega was a nonsignificant .25. Data were also inspected for the subscale Future-Vocational and Educational. The Education Methods groups had a score of 20 percent, the General Populations group's score was 15 percent, and the Resident Advisor trainee's score was 14 percent. Again, the Lawshe-Baker Nomograph was used to compare the relationship between groups. The omegas for comparisons were not significant.

Discussion

This study produced little evidence that membership in a particular group made a difference in identifying sources for problems. The three groups indicated their problems were: adjustment to college work, personal-social relations, finances, and living the college experience.

The findings that other groups identified curriculum and teaching

procedures as a source for concern, and that the first-ranked subscale for Education Methods students was social relations (perhaps a function of a higher percentage of females in that group) provided support for the use of the Mooney to identify sources of problems. More significant was the implication that the instrument identifies developmental trends.

Although there were no real differences for the subscale Future-Vocational and Education, there was a significant difference between Education Method students and the General Population students for the single item "Doubting I can get a job in my chosen vocation." This finding has implications for placement officials and teacher trainers.

Some may be surprised that the number one problem identified by 51 percent of the total student population studies was "not getting enough sleep." However, the same item was also the first ranked in De Sena's study (1966). The first ranked subscale for our total group--Social and Recreational--was not supportive of earlier studies which reported problems related to academic adjustment as first ranked. However, the subscales Adjustment to College Work and Curriculum and Teaching Procedures were ranked a close second and third with this population. These data tend to support the earlier studies.

The apparent similarity in types of problems identified by students studied in the 1960's and this population provided support for the hunch that the present population differs little from students of a decade ago. There was no indication that students in this study had more or fewer problems than those of ten years ago.

Conclusions

With the exception of the Education Methods students realistically having their concern for obtaining a teaching contract, there were few differences in the problems reported by the participants of this study and their predecessors of the 1960's. The possibility that students in methods courses are voicing grievances about their "irrevelance" as a function of human development and not of course work offers potential for further study.

The findings emphasize again the need for campus programs that encourage the personal-social growth of individual students.

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Table 1

First through Fifth Ranked Problems with Frequencies and Subscale Categories: Total Population

Rank	Item Number	Problem	Frequencies	Subscale
1	3	Not getting enough sleep	55	HPD
2	35	Wanting to improve my mind	51	SRA
3	54	Dull classes	45	CTP
4	114	Tiring of the same meals all the time	43	FLE
5	76	Not spending enough time in study	40	ACW

Table 2

First through Fifth Ranked Problem Subscales with Frequencies for Problems Circled: Total Population*

Rank	Subscale	Frequency
1	Social and Recreational Activities	1326
2	Adjustment to College Work	1248
3	Curriculum and Teaching Procedures	1108
4	Finances, Living Conditions and Employment	1059
5	Personal-Psychological Relations	1038

* Highest possible frequency for any subscale was 1605.

Table 3

First through Third Ranked Problems with Percentages* for Selected Student Groups

Group	Rank	Problem		Percentages
General Population n=49	1	Wanting to improve my mind Not spending enough time in study	tie	51%
	2	Not getting enough sleep		47%
	3	Dull classes Worrying about examinations	tie	41%
Resident Advisor Trainees n=35	1	Some courses poorly organized		86%
	2	Not getting enough sleep		69%
	3	Wanting to improve my mind		57%
Education Methods n=23	1	Tiring of the same meals all the time Doubting I can get a job in my chosen vocation	tie	52%
	2	Being overweight Disliking financial dependence on others	tie	49%
	3	Needing to watch every penny I spend Vocabulary too limited Lacking self-confidence Worrying about examinations Afraid of unemployment after graduation Too much work required in some courses	tie	44%

*All percentages rounded to whole numbers.

Table 4

First through Fifth Ranked Subscales with Percentages* for Selected Student Groups

Student Group	Rank	Subscale	Percent*
General Population	1	Adjustment to College Work	24%
	2	Social-Recreational Activities	23%
	3	Curriculum and Teaching Procedures	19%
	4	Personal-Psychological Relations	18%
	5	Finances, Living Conditions and Employment	17%
Resident Advisor Trainees	1	Curriculum and Teaching	25%
	2	Social-Recreational Activities	22%
	3	Adjustment to College Work	20%
	4	Finances, Living Conditions and Employment	17%
	5	Personal-Psychological Relations	16%
Education Methods	1	Social-Recreational Activities	22%
	2	Adjustment to College Work	21%
	3	The Future-Vocational and Educational	20%
	4	Finances, Living Conditions and Employment	20%
	5	Personal Psychological Relations	17%

*All percentages rounded to whole numbers.